GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS
LOK SABHA

STARRED QUESTION NO:388
ANSWERED ON:30.04.2007
GANGA AT RISK
Pradhan Shri Dharmendra;Rijiju Shri Kiren

Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a)whether the river Ganga has been included as one of the world's top ten rivers facing the greatest risk in a report by the World Environment Organisation;

(b)if so, the details thereof including the suggestions made in this regard;

(cthe reaction of the Government thereto; and

(d)the steps taken by the Government with a view to keeping the natural sources clean and safe and the outcome of such steps taken so far ?

Answer

THE MINISTER OF THE STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI A. RAJA)

(a) to (d) A statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement referred to in reply to parts (a) to (d) of Lok Sabha Starred Question No. 388 to be answered on Monday the 30th April, 2007 on 'Ganga at Risk'

(a) & (b) The Government is not aware of the existence of any organization by name of World Environment Organisation. As for the referred-to report which includes the river Ganga amongst the world's top ten rivers at risk, the Government is aware of a publication brought out by the World Wide Fund for Nature, an International Non-Government Organisation, which includes the river Ganga as one of the world's ten rivers facing risk. The Central Government is not aware of the data-base and the methodology adopted by the said NGO for making this Report. The Central Government has taken appropriate initiatives, and is committed to continue efforts towards conservation of natural resources. The report profiles the biodiversity of river Ganga, and perceives over extraction of water for agriculture and excessive water diversions affecting natural flows as major threats to the river. The report suggests, among others, improving efficiency in water use and irrigation of crops, end to perverse subsidies, capping of water extraction levels, further community education & awareness, and an integrated river basin management.

(c) & (d) The Central Government is seized of the problems stated in the WWF Report. The various national interests merit to be balanced in the process of formulation of strategy to deal with the problems stated in the Report.

As for the problem of abstraction of groundwater, and the need to optimize use of surface water, the Central Water Commission (CWC) under the Ministry of Water Resources pursues an approach for integrated and coordinated development of surface and groundwater resources and their conjunctive use. The CWC has formulated a National Perspective Plan for water resources development in the country that envisages inter-linking of rivers for transfer of water from surplus basins to water deficit basins for optimum utilization of water in the country.

The Ministry of Water Resources has taken both promotional and regulatory measures to conserve the surface and groundwater. The promotional measures comprise, providing technical guidance on rain water harvesting to various State Government as well as private agencies, Group Housing Societies, Resident Welfare Associations etc; requesting Central Ministries/ Departments to provide roof top rain water harvesting structures in the building under their control; issue of directions to States to adopt artificial recharge to groundwater/ promote rain water harvesting and to ensure inclusion of roof top rain water harvesting in the building bye-laws; circulation of a Manual/Guide on Artificial Recharge to Groundwater to the States/UTs to enable them to formulate area specific artificial recharge schemes to check the declining trend of ground water levels; construction of exploratory wells tapping arsenic free aquifer zones by the Central Ground Water Board in arsenic infested areas and handing them over to the State Governments for utilization; and circulation of a concept report titled 'Master Plan for Artificial Recharge to Ground Water' to all the States/ UTs identifying areas requiring artificial recharge of ground water in the country and to take measures for its implementation. The regulatory measures include notification by Central Ground Water Authority (CGWA) of certain over-exploited areas in the country for regulation of ground water development and management, and notification for registration in various States of groundwater abstraction structures, which showed a very steep decline in ground water levels and require action for regulation.

Under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of National River Conservation Plan (NRCP) of the Ministry of Environment & Forests, various works are undertaken for pollution abatement in major rivers including Ganga through interception and diversion of sewage for its

treatment and construction of Sewage Treatment Plants and Low Cost Sanitation. The NRCP presently covers 34 major rivers in 160 towns spread over 20 States. Under the Ganga Action Plan (GAP) Phase I & II, 1743 mld. (million litres per day) of sewage treatment capacity has been created so far. With the pollution abatement works completed so far under Ganga Action Plan, the water quality of the river Ganga has shown improvement at major locations over its pre-GAP quality as per the Water Quality Monitoring (WQM) undertaken by independent reputed institutions like Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd. (BHEL), Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Kanpur and Indian Toxicological Research Centre (ITRC), Lucknow. Presently there are 158 Water Quality Monitoring locations where the water quality of rivers is monitored by the Ministry through reputed independent institutions. The data is disseminated through six monthly bulletins to all the concerned agencies. Besides, the Central Pollution Control Board conducts Water Quality Monitoring at 698 locations on rivers and other water bodies in addition to monitoring of groundwater quality in 321 locations. An independent study of the Ganga Action Plan undertaken by Harvard Institute of International Development in 1995-97, in collaboration with reputed national institutes concluded that the GAP-I has delivered significant benefits to India; both users and non-users have benefited from it and; in terms of both the cost and time taken and GAP compares favourably with those of the other major rivers of the world like Thames, Rhine and Danube.

Under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of National Lake Conservation Plan of the Ministry of Environment & Forests, works for conservation and rejuvenation of major lakes are undertaken. The Plan presently covers 46 lakes in 13 States. Further, the Wetland Conservation Programme is another flagship scheme of the Ministry under which works for catchment area treatment, biodiversity conservation, siltation control etc. of National Wetlands are undertaken. Presently 94 Wetlands are covered under this programme.

The National Environment Policy, 2006 also advocates an integrated approach to management of river basins by the concerned river authorities, ensuring maintenance of adequate flows, and adherence to water quality standards throughout their course in all seasons.